EXPLORING WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT OF BUBERIAN AND SPATIAL RELATIONSHIPS IN CRIME AND MYSTERY NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

Critiques of crime and mystery fiction have indicated a diverse range of conflicts between female and other characters in various social and spatial contexts. Conflictual developments can reflect upon the representation of unequal or hierarchical relationships between the female and other characters and can denote the depiction of the female characters as either inferior or superior, especially during traumatic, dilemmatic, or hazardous situations. Therefore, the objectification of female characters by the Other as victims of crimes, or the female characters' dominance of the Other in their investigation of crimes or mysterious situations has been widely critiqued in crime and mystery narratives. This study acknowledges extant literary critiques of the conflictual development between female and other characters, while also examining the establishment of worthwhile relationships that value the equality between the Self and the Other in reciprocally experiencing and constructing their meaningful existence in social and spatial contexts. It integrates Martin Buber's concept of the I-It and I-Thou relationships and Edward Relph's concept of inauthentic and authentic space in order to analyse female protagonists' general development of Buberian and spatial relationships with others in crime and mystery novels. In doing so, this study accentuates the important factors that enhance or inhibit their overall relationship developments. Four award-winning American novels are analysed: Mindy McGinnis' *Heroine* (2019); Kyrie McCauley's *If These Wings Could Fly* (2020); Naomi Kritzer's *Catfishing on CatNet* (2019); and Katie Alender's *The Companion* (2020). The findings reveal the importance of individuals' sense of agency, free will and spontaneity in developing or inhibiting their relationships in both social and spatial contexts. The implications of the examination suggest the promising possibility of establishing desirable relationships when individuals' identities become flexible, especially during the suspension of laws, rigid social norms, traditional rules or social hierarchies.

Keywords: Buber; crime; protagonists; Relph; space; women

1. INTRODUCTION

In crime and mystery fiction, the Self and the Other are frequently depicted as being conflictive or antagonistic against each other in a chaotic world that is filled with perils, violence, the unknown and

uncertainty. Their relationship predominantly appears to underscore seemingly unresolved human conflicts. However, even in the disorderly world of this literary genre, there is often a denouement that functions to restore peace or a scenario that entails human betterment. The purpose of this study is to analyse this type of narrative, with a view to investigating an ontological question. That question is about the developmental phenomenology of meaningful interactions between the Self and the Other—in other words, how the existential ontology of the interaction between self and other is particularly instanced in this specific type of literary genre. In answering this philosophical question, the researcher hopes to open up a new and original hermeneutic point of view for reading this type of fiction. These self-same interpretative angles could then be utilised in structurally reading novels and short stories that partake in this type of narrative—in short, to instantiate an original structuralist rubric through which to read and assess this form of literature.

To begin with, developing relationships during critical, traumatic, life-threatening, and/or crime-related situations can be arduous or worthwhile, based on the interaction between the Self and the Other and their acknowledgement of each other's agency. On the one hand, within the realm of these crime and mystery narratives, female characters are often portrayed as weak or victimized individuals, developing unequal or unsatisfying relationships with others who are either criminals or their antagonists. Unfortunately, these female characters become objects of the Other's manipulative control or maltreatment. On the other hand, female characters who play the roles of talented detectives or the lead in resolving crime mysteries are depicted as strong-willed individuals who can control or dominate the Other—such as criminals, victims, and their antagonists—in order to achieve their goals or fulfil their personal desires. Generally, spatial contexts co-experienced by the female characters and the Other in crime and mystery narratives tend to be depicted as zones of danger, fright, and/or delusion, evoking implicit excitement, anxiety, fear, and/or terror in the readers. Therefore, the overall relationship development among characters in crime and mystery stories tends to be inharmonious or conflictive until the narratives reach their resolution. Sean McCann (1994) makes the following comment about crime and mystery works: "In the hard-boiled world, life is in itself already a melodrama witnessed by an unsympathetic audience. Beneath its gaze every utterance is a performance, every step or gesture is not merely action but acting, and every declaration is marked by the likelihood of deceit and misinterpretation (p. 17)." McCann's analysis reflects how the Self and the Other become antagonistic against each other in a corrupt and illusive world. Moreover, it speaks to the fact that there seems to be no real resolution or mutual satisfaction in the on-going dynamic of their relationship development. Female characters' development of their relationships with others in crime and mystery stories may seem undesirable, reflecting the all-too common and frequent occurrence of human conflicts. Although it may be difficult and testing to develop relationships during times of hardship, crisis, or trauma, especially in social and spatial contexts in which moral consciences or spiritual values are often disregarded, this study contends that female characters' development of worthwhile relationships with others can be utilitarian and promising. The study emphasizes the significance of individuals' mutual trust and understanding and their acknowledgement of each other's unique identity in establishing meaningful relationships.

The crime and mystery genre has been widely critiqued among literary scholars as it reflects multifaceted and interesting views of human relationships and complicated life experiences. According to the structuralist critic Tzvetan Todorov, crime fiction can be broadly defined as a narrative containing two main plots: a crime-related story and a crime investigation story (Scaggs, 2005, p. 2); whereas mystery fiction usually addresses the unknowable which can be disclosed through quandary or dilemmatic situations, and it can be classified into two kinds of stories: the riddle and the supernatural ("Mystery Story," 2019). This study hopes to instantiate a new, structuralist/phenomenological framework through which to investigate character development within the form of this genre. Based on several critics' extant comments on crime and mystery fiction, it is clear that female characters tend to develop unsatisfying relationships with other characters, which in many ways affects their sense of agency. For example, Kate Watson (2010) noted that in Metta Victor's *The Dead Letter*, female characters are depicted as either victimized or passive individuals. The relationship between the detective Burton and his daughter Lenore indicates women's weakness. Lenore is under her father's control, although she appears to possess some detective skills that can help him solve criminal cases. Accordingly, Lenore's free will to take action with other male characters like James and Richard also becomes diminished. Her father is jealous when he realizes that Lenore is dominated by James. Watson (2010) emphasizes that female characters are depicted with a low degree of power in projecting their minds and bodies (pp. 187–188). In Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun* (1860), this dynamic is related to the murder Donatello commits and the ensuing sense of guilt that female characters, such as Miriam and Hilda, experience after learning of his crime. Furthermore, this story portrays female characters' unpleasant relationships with

several male characters. For instance, Stacey Vallas (1990) commented that the story reflects how Miriam is under patriarchal control, which involves her father's authority and the dominance of other male characters (p. 85). Hilda is also depicted as being suppressed in an incestuous relationship with her father. Vallas (1990) commented that Hilda's desire for reproducing the arts influenced by her artistic father can be metaphorically perceived as a sexualized relationship between both of them (p. 87). In James Cain's *Serenade* (1953), the reader is presented with a hard-boiled story, depicting the sexual relationship between Sharp and Juana who later kills Sharp's homosexual lover, Hawes. Gregory B. Forter (1998) has noted that Juana, is objectified by the male gaze. This is apparent in her romantic relationship with Sharp, who feels attracted to her because of her racially exotic beauty, which derives from her Mexican-Indian background and her racially feminized figure (pp. 104, 115). Robert Lance Snyder (2021) addressed the sexual relationship between Juana and Sharp: "Their intercourse miraculously restores the masculine timbre of Sharp's voice, making her the kind of Jungian anima. Juana subsequently figures as "his pagan" redemptress" (p. 370). The inferiority of female characters is also presented in Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (2020), a fictional crime/slave-related narrative. It centres on the life of Linda Brent, who has to endure different forms of criminal acts that are committed against her by male characters; for example, Dr. Flint's sexual maltreatment of her and his cruel ownership of her as his slave. According to Jennifer Rae Greeson (2001), Linda Brent is depicted as a victimized female protagonist who suffers from men's abusive acts against her, within the springes of the slave system, as well as prostitution (pp. 293–294). From the depictions of these female characters, their relationships with the Other tend to be reinforced through either their victimization or their oppression, which is caused by the male characters' power, authority or manipulation. Hence, the identity construction of the female characters can become static or fixated: they are perceived as victims, the inferior or mere object of men's abuse and control. They are often portrayed, to use E.M. foster's formulation, as *flat characters.*

Accordingly, unsatisfying or unequal relationships between female characters and the Other can develop through the reinforcement of the female characters' identity construction in ontological relation to the Other, especially in a male character. Many critics of crime and mystery fiction have indicated that the dynamic between female and other characters often reflects women's strong sense of agency in realizing their goals or achievements. They are able to deal with dangerous, traumatic, and/or crime-related situations, whereas other characters become inferior or subordinate. For instance, Maysaa Jaber (2011) commented that female characters in the works of three American authors, namely Raymond Chandler, James M. Cain, and Dashiell Hammett are portrayed with free will in order to undermine the power, dominance, and crime-related perspicuity of the male characters. Jaber (2011) indicated that in Chandler's *The Big Sleep*, Vivian is depicted with female agency through her manipulation and in the aid of her sister, Carmen, in taking the wealth of the family. Jaber (2011) also noted that in Cain's works, through their ambition in forwarding their social status, female characters use their sexual appeal to dominate male characters (p. 3). Megan Dennis (2017) indicated that Venus Johnson, in Pauline Hopkins' *Hagar's Daughter: A Story of Southern Caste Prejudice*, is depicted as a female character who is superior to a male detective, Henson. Through her detective skills, intuition and domineering agency, she solves a particular criminal case. Nichole Kenley (2019) commented on how Scarpetta, in *The Body Farm,* the fifth book in the *Dr Kay Scarpetta* series by Patricia Cornwell, is in control of her various critical situations: she is very skilful in using forensic technology to analyse dead bodies in order to discover crime-related truths (pp. 99–100). It is noteworthy that female characters' outstanding potential or achievements in dealing with crime or mystery-related problems can negatively affect the development of their unequal relationships with the Other. This is especially the case with male characters, due to the fact that the female characters tend to be perceived as strong-willed individuals, who can resist or subvert masculine power or authority.

Aside from critiquing the relationships of female characters with others, several literary scholars have pointed out that in crime and mystery narratives, the relationships between these characters pertain to places; that is, places can significantly affect the development of female characters' relationships with other characters. For example, Julie Ann Baker (2017) commented on *The Haunting of Hill House* by Shirley Jackson that the relationship between Eleanor and her mother was spatially developed in a home space. Eleanor cannot escape her mother's domineering presence in the unwelcoming home atmosphere at Hill House (pp. 16–18). A domestic space can also symbolize people's cultural distinction and the ongoing development of their conflicts. In Jacqueline Woodson's *Another Brooklyn* (2017), the plot centres on several enigmatic and tragic occurrences in August's unfortunate life. These include her mother's mysterious disappearance, the haunting spirit of her brother, (who dies in war), and various crimes, (particularly sexual assaults), that she witnesses or learns about in her hometown. This story also vividly depicts how August feels spatially alienated from others. For example, James Peacock (2019) noted how August perceives Sylvia's family house as a foreign site, which can reflect August's different ethnic background as a Black American, who is perceived as inferior to Sylvia and her sisters, while her dreams of a better future can never be fulfilled (p. 151). Thus, domestic or home space can

significantly influence the development of the female characters and their relations with the Other, signifying that the female characters feel spatially alienated from the Other or even making them experience a sense of self-estrangement or self-loss.

Other interesting stories in this context, depicting spatial relationships between female characters and the Other are Toni Morrison's *Jazz* (1992) and Mary Austin's *Cactus Thorn* (1988). In *Jazz*, the narrative is related to Joe's murder of his former lover, Dorcas, and how this crime adversely affects his relationship with his wife, Violet. The depiction of the setting in this story reflects how people feel oppressed and alienated, while possessing the desire to dismiss their true identities in relation with others and their past experiences. For example, Joseph Scott Walker (1998) pointed out the depiction of a city of Black immigrants in Harlem in this story, where people tend to avoid thinking about their historical background, especially with respect to racial oppression. This spatial situation can affect people's wider contextual relationships. This is depicted at the beginning of the novel, where Violet feels rejected by her neighbours, although they had known her since they lived in Cottown, before they later settled in Harlem. The neighbours' unfriendliness stems from the fact that they do not want to feel self-conscious about their historical origins with Violet's presence at their new settlement in Harlem (p. 210). It is evident that certain places can catalyse female characters' control over their relationships with others. In Mary Austin's *Cactus Thorn*, the novel depicts how Arliss takes advantage of Dulcie sexually, but she eventually exacts retribution by murdering him. One observes in this story that in *a natural zone*, Dulcie can maintain her sense of autonomy in order to cope with her personal distress, which is caused by Arliss and others. For instance, Suzana Haji Muhammad (2001) has commented on the significance of a natural space—a desert—in *Cactus Thorn*, where Dulcie has the free will to develop her relationships with male characters. She perceives the desert as her true home, which offers freedom and independence from social restraint and patriarchal dominance (pp. 191, 194). Based on the literary critiques of these two novels, variously significant places, including a community town and a natural site can be equally important in enhancing or diminishing female characters' sense of selfhood or agency, affecting the development of their conflicts with the Other.

The criticisms of crime and mystery fiction reviewed above suggest that female characters tend to develop unresolved conflicts with other characters in both social and spatial contexts. Moreover, these texts are selected because the relational aspect of the story is at the forefront of the narrative, meaning that transactional analysis is warranted when investigating the structure of character relationships within these texts. The female characters' sense of selfhood may become either weakened or strengthened in such relationships, and they can be socially and spatially objectified or controlled by others, or vice versa. Therefore, the development of unsatisfying, unequal or I-It relationships between female characters and others in crime and mystery works will be examined further from the precis of existential and spatially multifaceted standpoints. I also argue that although the Self and the Other tend to develop I-It relationships that tend to predominate, they may *also establish satisfying relationships* that enhance their sense of selfhood and equality.

According to Buber's concept of the I-Thou relationship and Relph's concept of the authentic spatial relation, the Self and the Other can acknowledge each other's essence of being and share a developed mutual trust in establishing a desirable relationship. Therefore, I contend that in crime and mystery narratives, female characters can develop equal, satisfying or I-Thou relationships with the Other—both socially and spatially—as long as both participants are able to acknowledge each other's essence of being. However, this kind of narrative tends to represent chaotic, dangerous or life-threatening contexts where the Self and the Other are likely to be in serious conflict against each other.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study analyses the development—by way of the round dynamics of various female protagonists—of both Buberian and spatial relationships in crime and mystery novels. Four award-winning novels written by American authors were chosen as exemplars of this process in varying social and spatial contexts where different forms of crimes are committed and mysterious events occur. These novels vividly reflect that during critical or traumatic situations, the construction of the I-It relation between the female protagonists and the Other tends to predominate the narratives; however, the protagonists can still manage to form the I-Thou relationship with the Other through the development of their mutual understanding and trust. This can also lead to the dynamic construction of the protagonists' identities or can enhance their satisfying sense of selfhood in relation to the Other.

Furthermore, in terms of methodology, Martin Buber's theoretical framework of the I-It and I-Thou relationships and Edward Relph's interpretative framework of authentic and inauthentic space are integrated in order to analyse the protagonists' development of their relationships with others, especially in traumatic or critical situations. This is because these psychologically transactional and phenomenological theories pay close

attention to the intersubjective relationships of human agents and their effects upon individual social development.

 The selected novels are 1) Mindy McGinnis' *Heroine* (2019); 2) Kyrie McCauley's *If These Wings Could Fly* (2020); 3) Naomi Kritzer's *Catfishing on CatNet* (2019); and 4) Katie Alender's *The Companion* (2020). The analysis of the relationship dynamics in these novels will disclose significant factors that contribute to the development of desirable and undesirable relationships between the female protagonists and other major characters. These factors can be aligned with both Buber's and Relph's theoretical frameworks, while the analytical scope can be heuristically applied to other novels of the same genre in subsequent analyses.

Through a close analysis of the four crime and mystery narratives utilised in this study, the reader can see that they often depict interpersonal conflicts or estranged relationships between individuals who have experienced traumatic or life-threatening events. This, in turn, can reflect Martin Buber's concept of the I-It relation between the Self and the Other. In addition, it is observed that female characters in this genre are often depicted as weak or ineffectual individuals who tend to be regarded as helpless victims of crimes that are committed by their antagonists. Therefore, in order to highlight how typical crime and mystery-related situations can reinforce or catalyse the development of such self-objectifying relationships, the four crime and mystery novels mentioned above were carefully selected for literary analysis.

Additionally, they were chosen with a view to illustrating the development of I-It relations, particularly between female protagonists and the Other. This study also contests that crime and mystery fiction not merely represents problematic, static, or power-struggling relationships among individuals, but also portrays worthwhile relationships or the I-Thou relationship between the Self and the Other. However, it appears that this kind of mutual relationship between the Self and the Other in crime and mystery fiction has not been widely critiqued by many literary scholars. Therefore, this study attempts to further indicate the significance of the I-Thou relationship development between the Self and the Other as depicted in this particular genre. It also emphasizes how women can sustain their sense of selfhood and free will in taking responsible actions during difficult, critical or traumatic situations, especially when they are able to acknowledge the value of the Other in enhancing the construction of their identities and the meaning of their existence; consequently, this can lead to the positive development of their I-Thou relationships with the Other.

Furthermore, Edward Relph's interpretative framework of authentic and inauthentic space is integrated into this study in order to a fortiori reinforce the notion that places are crucial in the construction of I-It and I-Thou relationships and the Self's identity in relation to the Other. The study emphasizes the notion that crime-related places are ontologically depicted as inauthentic spaces, which can affect the development of the I-It relation between the Self and the Other.

This study also indicates that female characters are portrayed as the *subjects* or *victims* of the Other in various 'inauthentic' places where crimes are more likely to occur. Accordingly, it also attempts to underline the portrayal of multifaceted places in enhancing a strong sense of women's selfhood and their acknowledgement of the Other. This special element within these types of narratives enables female protagonists to co-construct their I-Thou relationships, so as to be able to cope with crime-related, critical or traumatic situations. This study posits that as a consequence of these dynamic, archetypal spaces, the equality between the Self and the Other in crime and mystery narratives can be spatially enhanced even at times of crisis or danger, as long as both participants can acknowledge each other's phenomenological presence.

As a result of these ontological observations, this study aims to illustrate, through the integration of both Buberian and spatial theoretical frameworks, that the female protagonists' development of variously located I-It, I-Thou and spatial relationships with the Other in crime and mystery related contexts, provides a malleable locale for the putative development of well-rounded female characters. This is a space that would have different ramifications in, for example, a traditional romance or a horror narrative.

The bald argument presented here is that a close analysis of the four novels aims to illustrate both the I-It and I-Thou relationships that the female protagonists develop with the existential Other. The following section provides an overview of the novels under analysis.

2.1 The analysed novels

The first novel, *Heroine*, is set in a world where drug misuse is criminalised and the protagonist attempts to conceal her drug abuse. It is related to Mickey's illegal and unethical use of drugs to improve her athletic performance and escape from different forms of personal issues. The analysis of this novel illustrates how Mickey fails to sustain her sense of selfhood in her I-It relationship with her adoptive father who devalues her existence. Nevertheless, with the help of her father's new wife, Devra, Mickey is eventually able to make the decision to give up drugs and reconstruct her essence of being in her I-Thou relationship with Devra.

The novel, *If These Wings Could Fly,* is mainly set in a criminal and mysterious context, which explores improper child parenting and household violence. The narrative centres on Leighton's suffering from violence and abuse in her family and her attempt to flee from her murderous father. The analysis of this story illustrates

the I-It relation between Leighton and her father who obstructs the development of her mental growth; it also indicates Leighton's development of the I-Thou relationship with her friend, Liam, who enables her to perceive the value of herself and her sense of agency in defying her father's oppressive control.

The next novel, *Catfishing on CatNet*, centres on an abduction and also focuses upon digital crimes. It depicts the life of Stephanie who has to escape from being kidnapped by her criminal father and endures her mother's manipulative control in creating Stephanie's false identity. The analysis indicates the formation of Stephanie's I-It relation with her parents who objectify her sense of self to suit their needs. It also illustrates how Stephanie can develop I-Thou connections with her close friend, Rachel, her online acquaintances and an artificial intelligence, CheshireCat, who support Stephanie as she faces potentially fatal situations as a result of her hazardous father's maltreatment and attack against her.

The last novel, *The Companion*, is related to a drugging, which is initiated in order to facilitate criminal control and murder. It centres on the life of Margot who is a suffering orphan living under the cruel guardianship of Laura, who attempts to murder Margot so as to conceal her crimes, particularly the one she commits against her own daughter, Agatha. The analysis demonstrates how Margot is depicted as a victim in her I-It relation with Laura and how Margot can manage to save her own life and that of Agatha through the development of their I-Thou relationship.

2.2 Martin Buber's concept of I-It and I-Thou relationships

According to Martin Buber (1937), the Self always exists in relation to other beings or things. The relation between the Self and other entities is in a fluctuating bonding state, which is termed by Buber as "the between." The Self has the potential to establish a bond with things or persons or "enter into relations" with them. The reciprocal relation between the Self and the Other involves sharing or participating, which implies the act of giving and taking between the two parties (p. 39). Thus, the Self's personal and spiritual growth can be significantly enhanced through its reciprocal interaction and communion with other beings or things. The Self should be able to face different forms of reality in knowing people or objects in the context it shares with the Other (p. 63).

The Self or "I" has two dissimilar elements: 1) the I of I-It and 2) the I of I-Thou. The I of I-It is turned inward toward itself; it is egotistical and manipulative. The I of I-It establishes an inauthentic relationship, in which the I uses the Other or things for its self-serving purposes. In contrast, the I of I-Thou is turned outward toward other beings or things; it is mutual and free. The I of I-Thou develops an authentic relationship that reinforces equality and reciprocity between the Self and the Other. These two elements of the "I" reflect the Self's will and attitude to take action in relation to other entities (Buber, 1937, p. 62).

In developing the I-Thou relationship with the Other, it is significant for the Self to take responsible action. For instance, the Self needs to supersede its egotistical attitude and simultaneously become aware of its uniqueness. After this stage, the Self can acknowledge the Other as "Thou" or perceive it as a unique being. When the Self "meets" or "encounters" the Other, it does not merge or become an entity with the Other; both participants sustain their separate and unique identities. The Self does not need to demand or command the Other for any response as in this genuine relationship, the Self and the Other have achieved the ability to respond interactively to each other even in silence or without engaging in any conversation (Buber, 1937, pp. 39, 84).

However, in a "mismeeting" between the Self and the Other, which contributes to the development of the I-It relation, the Self relates to the Other in terms of its similarity or sameness rather than its uniqueness. The Self experiences or approaches the Other by utilising or sampling what the Other has given or is perceived as. However, by only taking and never giving anything in return, the Self becomes egocentric and turns inward, focusing only on its own desires and satisfactions. The Self perceives the Other as a mere object, denying the Other's being and simultaneously disregarding the uniqueness of the Other. The Self also attempts to define or restrain the meaning of the Other's uniqueness for the benefit of its own will (Buber, 1937, pp. 29–30).

The encounter between the Self and the Other in the I-Thou relationship tends to be immediate and short in duration. When the Self encounters the Other, the Other in an earlier state of the It becomes Thou, and then Thou returns to the former state as It again. This dialogic process formulates itself endlessly. It is a constituent part of human reality as we always encounter things or persons in our daily lives. The I-It and I-Thou relations are constructed differently through the concept of time and space. The I-It represents a past, which the Self relates with the Other or external things. At a particular point in time and space, the Self experiences other beings or objects through different forms of actions, such as observation, analysis, utilisation, or classification; which were completed in the past. Consequently, the I-It experience can be placed in a logical order or be properly coordinated. The Self of the I-It perceives the Other based on quantities or qualities and never truly relates itself to the Other with its whole being or soul. In contrast, the I-Thou reinforces the present and immediate moment in which the Self encounters the Other. The Self becomes a fully active participant that devotes its entire being towards the intentional act of interacting with the Other, within the phenomenological

realm of unidentifiable space and time. The I-Thou experience can never be entirely coordinated because of its presence, immediacy, and spontaneity (Buber, 1937, pp. 11–17).

2.3 Relph's spatial concept: Authentic and inauthentic senses of place

It is evident that Martin Buber's concept of I-It and I-Thou relations can relate to Edward Relph's spatial concepts. Relph (1976) indicated that places are significant in human existence and can affect the construction of human identity and interpersonal relationships. According to Relph (1976), people broadly have two basic senses of place, namely authentic and inauthentic ones (p. 63). Relph (1976) pointed out that Buber's concept of the I-Thou relation is similar to the authentic sense of place, saying, "In unselfconscious experience, an authentic sense of place is rather like the type of relationship characterized by Martin Buber (1958) as "I-Thou," in which the subject and object, person and place, divisions are wholly replaced by the relationship itself, for this is complete and mutual" (p. 65). People who have an authentic sense of place are genuine, honest, and responsible for making decisions in the spatial and social contexts in which they live, while establishing a reciprocal and immediate relationship with the Other and the world. Authentic people can acknowledge that places have identities and can be significantly constructed by their free will. They do not blame the influence of fate, history, or social systems in determining the spatial meanings of their existence; however, they take full responsibility for their choices (Relph, 1976, p. 64).

In contrast, people can experience the Other and the world through an inauthentic sense of place or "a sense of placelessness." People with an inauthentic sense of place disregard the importance of places and the spatial meaning-construction. They perceive places based on stereotypical functions and frivolous qualities. Relph (1976) commented on the inauthenticity of place, saying, "In inauthentic experience places are seen only in terms of more or less useful features, or through some abstract *a priori* model and rigid habits of thought and behavior; above all such experiences are casual, superficial, and partial" (p. 82, original emphasis). Without reflection, people living inauthentic existences perceive places as objects controlled by the Other, or set by the precis of predominant social beliefs.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section illustrates the significant research findings and provides an analytical discussion of the selected four crime and mystery novels. It focuses on the female protagonists' development of *the I-It*, *I-Thou* and *spatial* relationships with the Other as depicted in these novels. The overall results reflect how crime and mystery fiction not only portrays the world of conflicts between the protagonists and the Other, but also depicts that both participants can construct satisfying relationships with each other even when they encounter critical or traumatic situations. Furthermore, places also affect the meaning-construction of the protagonists' identities and their relationships with the Other. The research results reflect how places depicted in this genre play a significantly more important role than just a background or backdrop to a story, which can create suspense or tension. In fact, they can be highly regarded as a significant factor in shaping the protagonists' identities and their I-It/I-Thou relationships with the Other.

These results further explore and address the main thesis of the paper, which is that transactional relationship between female agents and the Other are in particular central to many crime/mystery fiction texts. The phenomenology of these developmental relationships is further examined within the contextual details of the female character-development within this genre of fiction.

3.1 Female protagonists' development of the I-It relationship

According to the forgoing critiques of fictional crime and mystery relationships, in the sociodynamic between female characters and others, the formers are depicted as being fragile and under the control of others, especially male characters (Vallas, 1990, p. 85; Watson, 2010, pp. 158, 187–188). The findings in this study reveal that the conflicts between these characters reflect the development of the I-It relation, which is reinforced when the Self and the Other perceive their identities as static, treat each other as mutually inferior, or equate each other with material objects, animals, and/or dehumanized entities. For instance, in Mindy McGinnis' *Heroine*, Mickey is depicted as a static Self who perceives her being as the I of It, and the Other treats her as a devalued Self. In the estranged relationship with her adoptive father, Mickey doubts the essence of her being while bitterly indicating that her adoptive father even considers his adoption of her as a convenient means of facilitating the rearing of a child—because it is inexpensive and requires less paperwork (McGinnis, 2019, p. 23). Mickey becomes a mere object that can be evaluated in terms of financial value and managerial procedures. She is not perceived as a lovable child who has a familial bond with her father, but is instead considered a cheap object for him to possess and utilise.

In I-It family-oriented relations, the Self and the Other tend to abandon their familial bond, especially when one of them uses violence or verbal abuse to attack the other—or has indignant perceptions of the other.

Female protagonists avoid resolving their conflicts through confrontations with their parents, but tend to rebel against their parental control in indirect, subtle, or passive ways. For example, in Kyrie McCauley's *If These Wings Could Fly*, the development of I-It relationships is apparent through the protagonist's interactions with her parents. Leighton is suppressed through her father's abusive control, which obstructs the mature development of her sense of selfhood. Leighton becomes a silent, passive, and victimized object of his abuse and manipulation. Although she tends to avoid confronting her father during various conflicts, she does try to rebel against his domination. For example, Leighton writes an award-winning essay that is subtly related to the domestic violence in her household to implicitly express her suffering. She subsequently uses it as a medium to retaliate against her father's maltreatment. Consequently, her rebellious act shocks people in her community (McCauley, 2020, pp. 335–336).

Additionally, in Naomi Kritzer's *Catfishing on CatNet*, the protagonist Stephanie constructs I-It relations with her parents. Based on her relationship with her father, Stephanie abandons her identity as his daughter and acknowledges him as a criminal who commits serious crimes against her and her mother. He kidnaps his wife and cuts off one of her fingers, viciously hoping to access important information that will help him control their digital world. He also follows Stephanie to several places and tries to kidnap her (Kritzer, 2019, pp. 154, 157, 184, 248, 267). After the police officers manage to capture her father, Stephanie shows him no sympathy, but instead feels content that her father is eventually jailed. She also forms an I-It relationship with her mother. Both of them hardly communicate with each other; her mother avoids talking honestly with Stephanie about significant life issues. The true nature of Stephanie's identity is falsified by her mother to deceive others and to serve her mother's aim in escaping her father. Stephanie thinks that there is always a wall between her and her mother, and the meaning of her life is constructed through horrible lies, which her mother has invented (Kritzer, 2019, pp. 26, 28, 140). The estranged parent-child relationship in this family is grounded in the protagonist's perception of her parents as deceivers, abusers or culprits who attempt to manipulate her according to their malicious intentions and to their advantages.

According to the critics' comments on female characters' development of their unequal relationships with others, female characters are objectified by others through their physical beauty or attraction; (Forter, 1998, pp. 104, 115; Greeson, 2001, pp. 293–294; Snyder, 2021, p. 370); and women who have strong agency also use their sexual appeal to manipulate others (Jaber, 2011, pp. 3, 93–94). This reflects how the I-It relation between the Self and the Other is developed through their static and superficial perception of themselves and others or through their disregard for mutual qua honest communication. Based on the analytical observation of the four novels in this study, the Self, through its free will, tends to solidify itself through different forms of objects when it is controlled, maltreated, or manipulated by the Other. That is, the Self disregards its ability to behave responsibly in order to construct a worthwhile meaning of its identity, but the Self instead perceives its entity as a mere object, such as an automation without consciousness, which is controlled or exploited by the Other. Thus, the Other with its immense power can control the identity-construction of the Self. This can heighten the Self's state of victimization in the dynamics of its relationship with the Other. For instance, in Katie Alender's *The Companion*, the I-It relationship between the protagonist, Margot, and her guardian Laura reflects how the Self's identity becomes solidified by the Other for its own advantage or self-oriented purpose. The Self chooses to perceive itself as the Other's inferior or subordinate. When Laura forces Margot to work for her family permanently, Margot feels that such a life would deprive her from attaining her complete freedom; she would become like a robot serving Laura and her family and could eventually lose her sense of sanity (Alender, 2020, pp. 221–222). Margot's perception of her insanity and her robotic-like condition reflects how the Self is deprived of the freewill to think or act responsibly because of the Other's dominance and the Self's pessimistic self-perception. In this I-It relation, Laura is metaphorically depicted as a life engineer who controls an automaton like Margot, who lacks mental functions and sensibility.

Overall, the female protagonists' development of their I-It relationships with the Other is strongly reinforced through the Other's victimization or manipulation of them. This is also instanced through the protagonists' own choices in perceiving the Other as their antagonist and regarding themselves as ineffectual or powerless individuals. Moreover, as a consequence of these behavioural patterns, they become agents that have to struggle in resisting the Other's unjust dominance over the meaning construction of their identities and existence.

3.2 Female protagonists' development of the I-Thou relationship

In crime and mystery narratives, critics have indicated different conflicts between female and other characters. These female characters are depicted as being superior to other characters and have certain special abilities to deal with problematic situations (Dennis, 2017, p. 44; Kenley, 2019, pp. 99–100, 108–109). This reflects how the Self and the Other perceive themselves as unequal entities, trying to dominate each other in the development of their I-It relation. In contrast, the findings in this study show that in crime and mystery works, female characters form I-Thou relationships with others, and can acknowledge the Other's value and

perceive the Other as their equal in enhancing the meaning of their existence. For instance, in *Heroine*, Mickey develops an I-Thou relationship with her father's new wife, Devra, who tries to help Mickey during her drug withdrawal. As Mickey confesses her crime of taking heroin to Devra, both of them are depicted as two equal individuals who try to acknowledge each other's value. They are fully present and become engaged in listening to each other; they withhold nothing in their spontaneous communication with each other. Devra imagines Mickey's suffering and tries to co-experience all the possible negative consequences of Mickey's drug abuse, and tries to offer practical solutions to her drug-related problems (McGinnis, 2019, p. 384). Devra affirms and confirms to Mickey the truth of her traumatic situation: that she will suffer from drug withdrawal, but she will eventually manage to quit using drugs. As Devra tells Mickey, "you're going to feel worse before you feel better" (McGinnis, 2019, p. 384). The event happens spontaneously and unexpectedly. It metaphorically illustrates the outstanding elements of the I-Thou relationship, especially when the Self and the Other can imagine each other's life or existence and simultaneously and symbiotically sustain their own unique identities. Mickey has realized that Devra is independent from her, but she can also acknowledge Devra's potential in aiding her, leading to the development of their *I-Thou* relationship. Through Devra's help, Mickey can abandon her former Self as a drug-using athlete; and she finally attempts to reconstruct her new identity as a hopeful individual.

In *If These Wings Could Fly*, a complete development of an I-Thou relationship is depicted through Leighton's relationship with her friend, Liam. With genuine trust in him, Leighton can share her life experiences with Liam, who helps reassure her essence of being. For instance, when Leighton realizes that Liam paints a picture of a brave girl with wings based on Leighton's life story, Leighton understands the symbolic meaning of the painting and begins perceiving the possibility of her being able to liberate herself from her father's unjust power (McCauley, 2020, pp. 280–284). With Liam's mental support, which strengthens Leighton's sense of agency, Leighton can also reflect upon her role as a strong-willed individual who should not be fearful about rebelling against injustice or male dominance, especially from her father's maltreatment. The development of the I-Thou relationship with Liam helps Leighton evaluate her potential to make a positive change in her life and alleviate the suffering from her familial problems.

It is noteworthy that the I-Thou relationship can be established when the Self and the Other transcend their sensory or superficial perceptions and disregard their rigid social, biological, and gender identities to acknowledge each other's unique and different qualities while sharing mutual trust and understanding or spontaneously co-experiencing each other's lives. For example, in Naomi Kritzer's *Catfishing on CatNet*, an interesting I-Thou relationship is depicted between Stephanie and an artificial intelligence (AI) entity named CheshireCat—a digital being that has become Stephanie's true friend. Stephanie and CheshireCat have essential qualities in developing their I-Thou relationship: they accept each other's unique identity. Stephanie, with genuine trust, believes that CheshireCat can be her friend, even though it is not human. CheshireCat's desire to protect Stephanie also indicates its spontaneous act in transcending its lack of physical body in order to construct an I-Thou relationship with Stephanie. For Stephanie, CheshireCat is not merely AI or digital data controlled by a group of humans; she perceives it as a special being because of its compassion and humanity (Kritzer, 2019, pp. 241, 263). The complete development of the I-Thou relationship between the protagonist and the digital entity emphasizes the significance of open-mindedness, trust, and understanding in successfully accepting each other's unique or distinct identities.

The Self and the Other may co-experience each other's suffering or metaphorically associate their suffering with certain objects, while sharing trust and expressing empathy for each other. This enables them to initiate their I-Thou bond. For example, in *The Companion*, these I-Thou elements are apparent in the development of a meaningful bond between Margot and Agatha. Margot is depicted as an open-minded person who can accept her dutiful role as a companion of Agatha, who has severe mental problems. Through her compassion and understanding for Agatha, Margot can also relate her own mental condition to that of Agatha. Margot perceives Agatha as a shell or a being without consciousness or soul as Agatha does not seem to be able to sensibly talk or respond to anything. Margot also feels as though she were as hollow as Agatha: Margot metaphorically has only a shell or her physical body, without any spirit after the death of all of her beloved family members in a car accident (Alender, 2020, pp. 40, 42, 165). By co-experiencing Agatha's suffering, Margot can transcend Agatha's outer shell to perceive her inner quality. Finally, both Margot and Agatha manage to rescue each other successfully from their life-threatening situations and from Laura's murderous attack. Margot and Agatha are depicted as friends who fulfil each other's essence of being and co-construct each other's sense of selfhood. The I-thou relationship between them is fully developed through their reciprocal trust and acceptance of each other's unique identity.

Overall, the female protagonists' development of their I-Thou relationships with the Other can become successful, especially when the protagonists and the Other perceive themselves as equal and unique entities who have mutual trust and understanding, while open-mindedly and spontaneously co-experiencing each other's suffering. The development of their I-Thou relationships can also be promisingly enhanced when they

can disregard each other's superficial or physical qualities and acknowledge each other's inner qualities or virtues during crime-related or traumatic situations.

3.3 Female protagonists' development of spatial relationships

Places in crime and mystery narratives are critiqued as being harmful or unpleasant, and as affecting the personal development of female characters and others negatively (Jaber 2011, pp. 88–89, 93; Walker, 1998, p. 210). The findings in this study emphasize that the development of the protagonists' I-It relationships with others is reinforced in an inauthentic space that inhibits the protagonists from acknowledging the essence of their being and that of the Other. The construction of the protagonists' *spatial identities,* or how the meaning of their identities and existence is reinforced through their interrelation to places, is adversely affected in public places. The findings indicate that for public places like schools, young female protagonists lose their sense of belonging and are dominated by others who make them feel alienated or unsafe. For instance, in *Catfishing on CatNet*, Stephanie feels trapped in the school space, especially its parking area where her criminal father drives around to hunt for her (Kritzer, 2019, pp. 183–184). Stephanie struggles to maintain her spatial sense of belonging and is suppressed by the Other, who predominantly takes control over her and attempts to construct the meaning of her spatial identity as an outcast or wrongdoer. In *Heroine*, school is portrayed as an oppressive and power-struggling space between Mickey and her schoolmates. Mickey tries to obstruct their attempt to construct the meaning of her identity as a drug user. They also try to sustain the space of school as a safe zone by inspecting her drug-related behaviour and encouraging her to reveal the truth about her drug taking, in order to evaluate whether or not she should maintain her sense of place at school (McGinnis, 2019, pp. 255–256, 292–293).

Not only is the public space of schools depicted as an unsafe or inauthentic space, which inhibits the female protagonists from sustaining their spatial sense of selfhood and security, but the domestic space of home also intensifies their terror, fear or mistrust, catalysing the formation of their I-It relations with the Other. Critics have pointed out the depiction of home as an oppressive place where female characters develop conflicts with others (Baker, 2017, pp. 16–18; Peacock, 2019, p. 151). The findings in this study reinforce critics' comments and further reveal that home can be a terrifying site for the Self and the Other owing to its relative exterior and interior conditions; the suspension of legal enforcement and social rules; and the lack of moral responsibility of the Self and the Other. In all of the four novels, home is portrayed as an inauthentic space that intensifies the conflicts between the protagonists and the Other. For instance, in *Heroine*, Mickey's identity as a drug addict is constructed in Edith's house, where social rules and moral obligations are neglected. The place is depicted as though it were situated in an imaginary realm, which enables Mickey to completely dismiss her mental and physical pain, humiliation, and shame. The house also becomes a horrific site after Mickey's three friends die from drug overdose. Their dead bodies are depicted as mere objects and cadavers, with which Mickey irresponsibly denies having any relationship (McGinnis, 2019, pp. 192, 361).

In *If These Wings Could Fly*, Leighton's home destroys her sense of belonging because of her father's immense domination. Leighton feels unsafe and is full of fear with the continued presence of her father at home. She perceives her home as a both graveyard and a haunted house. Her comparison of home to the inauthentic space of the dead or of unliving beings can indicate that Leighton loses her sense of security. Home may be like a graveyard for keeping her dead body, as her violent father is capable of killing her and her family members at any time. Leighton imagines "a crawl space" in the house, where her father would hide the dead bodies of her, her mother, and her siblings (McCauley, 2020, pp. 29, 88, 230). Therefore, home space becomes a dangerous zone, where the protagonist can perceive the possibility of her own death caused by her abusive father.

In *Catfishing on CatNet*, Stephanie loses her sense of belonging at home, which has an unpleasant atmosphere. The physical conditions of home, which indicate a lack of comfort and aesthetic beauty, tend to make her feel oppressed and stimulate her desire to leave. The inauthentic space of home is intensified further through the estranged relationship between Stephanie and her mother, who uses furniture to barricade the door of her bedroom and forbids Stephanie from coming inside (Kritzer, 2019, pp. 17, 40, 54). Having a completely paranoid episode, her mother thinks that the barrier can protect her from potential harm by any intruder, especially her husband. However, this barrier makes Stephanie feel spatially alienated from her mother—it constructs the spatial meaning of home as a space of fear and distrust—instead of mutual understanding between the family members.

In *The Companion*, Margot perceives the Suttons' house as an oppressive space, which diminishes her spatial sense of belonging. For instance, when Margot looks at the oil paintings of people hung on the walls, she perceives in their solemn eyes many unhappy lives from the past, which, in turn, makes her feel scared and unsafe. The paintings help construct a gothic meaning of home as an ultimately unhappy place. Looking at the expensive oil paintings and precious antiques in the luxurious house, Margot also feels alienated, as the presence of these highly-valued objects actually adds stress to her perceived inferior status as a poor and

insignificant orphan (Alender, 2020, pp. 94, 119). Due to this spatial oppression, the Suttons' inauthentic home space helps to shape Margot's identity as a devalued Self or the I of It—a mere outsider who has to forge her I-It relation with the Suttons.

In contrast to an inauthentic space which is static or fixated, an authentic space can be dynamic and significant in enhancing the I-Thou relationship between the Self and the Other, while helping in their mutual acknowledgement of each other's spatial identity. In *Heroine*, Mickey's bathroom is portrayed as an authentic space that enables Mickey to perceive her critical situation realistically and at the same time allows her to acknowledge the Other's being. In the excluded space of the bathroom, Mickey can peacefully evaluate the right decisions she should make and openly express her suffering to Devra, without fear of being judged as a drug addict. The private space in her bathroom allows Mickey to gradually accept her drug-related crime and realistically perceive the negative consequences of her drug abuse, such as the loss of other people's respect and her painful sense of guilt. Simultaneously, through her former experiences of taking drugs, Devra co-experiences Mickey's trauma and encourages her to entertain the possibility of quitting drugs and reconstructing a newly promising identity for herself (McGinnis, 2019, pp. 380–383). Thus, places can be developed as authentic spaces, especially when the Self can sustain its sense of privacy. This socially psychological sense contributes to the on-going construction of the Self's dynamic identity in relation to the Other's significant role as a co-meaning creator.

Another good example of a spatial sense of privacy is depicted in the bedroom space of home, which enables the Self to imagine the possibility of alleviating its suffering during traumatic situations. In *If These Wings Could Fly*, the authentic space of Leighton's bedroom is constructed by reinforcing the I-Thou relationship between Leighton and her sisters. Leighton acknowledges her sisters' essence of being, while trying to encourage them to imagine a natural and mysterious space in her bedroom where all imagine that they are situated on another planet. They perceive themselves as explorers who go camping on a mountain. The sisters can see Leighton's goodwill and are eventually able to dismiss the frightening sound of the fighting between their parents. The *crow* named Joe and his crow companions also help form an authentic home space for Leighton and her family. They fly to rescue Leighton and her family, who are jumping from the house roof to escape the cruel father, when the house is on fire (McCauley, 2020, pp. 68–69, 379). The crows enhance the meaning of Leighton's home as an enduring site, which offers a positive change and promising future for Leighton and the family, where they can be free from the father's unjust power.

Isolated places or even virtual sites can be perceived as being spatially authentic because they both enable the Self to sustain freedom with a sense of selfhood and construct a dynamic identity, while developing an I-Thou relationship with the Other. In *Catfishing on CatNet*, in the fantasy-like space of an abandoned farmhouse, Stephanie can disregard her identity as her father's victim. She can see how she and her best friend, Rachel, have become indispensable for each other, especially in their critical escape from Stephanie's father (Kritzer, 2019, pp. 213–214). The authentic space of the abandoned farmhouse constructs Stephanie's identity as a free-spirited individual who becomes optimistic in acknowledging the Other's value and that of her own inner-self. An authentic space can also be created in a virtual digital world. Through an online platform called Clowder, Stephanie gains her sense of freedom and autonomy in initiating an I-Thou relationship with her online friends who are different from her in several ways, such as their gender preferences, family backgrounds, and overall social status. They freely share their personal problems and secrets with each other without any shame or judgement (Kritzer, 2019, pp. 76–77, 99). They cooperate in applying digital information and technology in order to stop Stephanie's father from both attacking and kidnapping her (Kritzer, 2019, pp. 204-205, 270-275). Due to the absence of rigid social rules or norms, the abandoned farmhouse and the digital space constitute excluded, private zones, where the protagonist and the Other can share their mutual trust and understanding in critical or life-threatening situations.

In a similar manner, a natural zone can be perceived as an authentic space, which allows the Self to alleviate its suffering from crime-related problems since the Self can gain a spatial sense of freedom. In *The Companion*, Margot attempts to form an authentic space in the garden of the Suttons' house, where she can acknowledge the importance of the Other and realize her potential to attain freedom and a sense of autonomy. Margot perceives the natural zone of the garden as a secret path to another mysterious world where she can discover the truth about Laura's crimes (Alender, 2020, p. 106). The garden space is depicted as a safe zone in which Margot can regain her sense of autonomy in protecting herself from Laura's manipulative attacks against her. Freedom and privacy, created in a natural zone, can be significant factors which help construct an authentic sense of place. This is because they form a spatial sense of belonging. In this space, the protagonist can evaluate her crime-related experiences, so as to be able to resolve crime mysteries or other problems.

Overall, the female protagonists form their agential spatial relationships with the Other in both *inauthentic* and *authentic* spaces. School and home are depicted as inauthentic spaces, which reinforce the development of the protagonists' I-It relations. These zones create their spatial sense of alienation, insecurity,

terror or oppression as the protagonists are being judged, controlled, manipulated or maltreated by the Other within them. In contrast, authentic places that enhance their sense of privacy and autonomy, include a home bathroom, a bedroom, a digital site and variously natural or excluded areas. These spaces allow the protagonists to authentically construct their I-Thou relationships with the Other, while also resolving their crime/mystery related problems.

4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

According to this analysis of female protagonists' development in terms of both Buberian and spatial relationships with the Other in the aforementioned four crime and mystery novels, it has been found that the significant factors contributing to the development of the I-It relationships are the protagonists' static or pessimistic perceptions of themselves and the Other; and also the Other's objectification of the protagonists as weak, inferior, and victimized individuals through violence and other forms of verbal and non-verbal abuse. In their I-It relations, the protagonists and the Other have never seriously attempted to form honest and reasonable communication channels with each other. This means that they never tried to resolve their conflicts—as they tended to only be concerned with their own interests, benefits, personal goals, and life security—especially in critical, traumatic, and/or crime-related situations. In these texts, the protagonists' suffering and trauma intensified further through their own choices in adopting pessimistic perceptions about themselves, especially when they found themselves under the control of the Other. The protagonists' I-It relations with the Other were apparently reinforced in places perceived as inauthentic, such as school and home spaces, where inconsiderate, illegal, crime-related, and/or immoral activities had become the norm. In these inauthentic spaces, the protagonists tended to be victimized and/or manipulated by the Other and failed to sustain their sense of selfhood as decent, reasonable, and/or mentally-healthy individuals.

Factors that helped enhance the protagonists' sense of selfhood and I-Thou relationships included the protagonists' acceptance of the Other's mental support and their useful roles in aiding them in resolving crime mysteries and/or their crime-related problems; also, the protagonists' and the Other's mutual acknowledgement of each other's unique qualities or suffering; and the reciprocal trust and understanding between the protagonists and the Other in spontaneously co-experiencing their suffering and traumatic situations. In their I-Thou relations with the Other, the protagonists can reflect upon their strengths and weaknesses, acknowledging the dynamic construction of their identities, while those who have committed illegal activities or have been victims of crimes are willing to reconstruct their new identities to enrich the meaning of their selfhood and their I-Thou relationships with the Other. In lethal situations, both the protagonists and the Other are willing to spontaneously sacrifice their lives for each other's sake. In *authentic spaces*, the I-Thou relationships tend to be fully developed. The authentic spaces are portrayed as isolated or excluded areas and the virtual digital world, where the protagonists' suffering is alleviated through the Other's compassion and through the protagonists' self-acknowledgement of their own value. Finally, it is noteworthy that the Other, who becomes the protagonists' genuine friend or trustworthy being includes humans and digital and virtual entities, as well as animals. This reflects the diversity of the Other in establishing the I-Thou relationships with the protagonists, who can consider the uniqueness of the Other through their open-minded and non-discriminatory perspectives.

In the contextual crime and mystery world depicted in the texts under analysis here, the role of the Other shapes the meaning construction of the protagonists' identities. Being antagonistic against the protagonists, the Other is depicted as being saddled with variously undesirable qualities, such as being egotistical, manipulative and self-serving. Apparent instances of the Other include family members, particularly parents, or guardians, whose roles are expected to nurture the protagonists' physical and mental growth or their well-being. However, the Other instead undermines the protagonists' sense of selfhood through multiple forms of illegal acts against them, such as violent threats, aggressive physical force and attempts at abduction or murder. The protagonists, thus, are depicted as vulnerable and helpless individuals, who struggle to leave their homes or domestic environments in order to maintain their safety, survival or mental stability. In contrast, in the I-Thou relationships, the Other possesses significant qualities that aid in strengthening the protagonists' sense of selfhood and autonomy, such as compassion and good will. Outstanding examples of the Other enhancing the protagonists' desirable identity construction are friends, acquaintances and non-human beings. The natural, isolated, imaginary, or virtual space where the protagonists develop their I-Thou relationships with the Other can enrich the dynamic meaning-construction of the protagonists' identities as promising individuals who possess positive qualities, such as problem-solving skills, optimism, and mental strength. Therefore, the development of the I-Thou relationships between the protagonists and the Other in both social and spatial contexts helps alleviate the protagonists' distress, suffering or traumas that are caused by various crime-related situations. Through the mutual trust developed between the protagonists and the

Other in their I-Thou relationships, both participants can help restore peace and reduce tension in these crime-related situations.

In conclusion, the author suggests that future research in crime and mystery narratives should examine digital and virtual contexts in which the Self and the Other may develop their Buberian and spatial relationships. Different aspects that contribute toward the development of I-It as well as I-Thou relationships should be discovered and analysed. Examples of these aspects may be related to the significance of crime-related and/or lethal situations in stimulating the Self and the Other in developing their relationships, and the absence or suspension of social norms and legal enforcement in enhancing or obstructing stated relationships. It may also be beneficial to examine whether I-Thou relationships can be established truly among villains or antagonists within a plot structure. The depiction of animals, non-human entities, or individuals with equivalent social identities can also be explored further in terms of the I of I-Thou qualities, which tend to ultimately lead to the development of desirable relationships with others. Spatial contexts like the realm of death or the spatial state of sacredness should be assessed and explored further in the context of whether or not they are significant in enhancing or obstructing the possibility of Buberian relationships and in terms of individual characters' potential criminal, victimhood or detective identarian aspects. Future findings on these and other closely related research aspects may be fruitful in illustrating variously multifaceted aspects of human relationships and their interrelationships with other individuals, animals, and non-human beings in different social and spatial contexts in the textual praxis of crime and mystery fiction.

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